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**Online Marketing and Small Business Technology Essentials**

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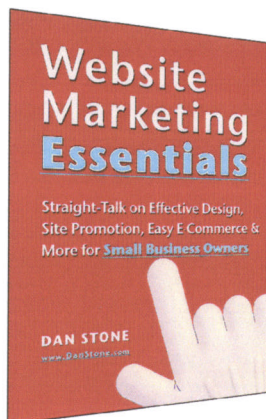
### Speaker Bio: Dan Stone, 360Village.com



Dan Stone has been working with small businesses for nine years helping them develop effective websites and communicate their marketing messages online. Clients of 360Village draw on his expertise as both a search engine marketing authority and a nationally recognized photographer specializing in virtual tours.

Dan has extensive teaching and training experience including serving as a past panelist at the *Search Engine Strategies* conference in Silicon Valley, teaching microeconomics at the college level, and leading many Web-related workshops. His company's *Interactive Community Guide* helps local businesses target local consumers with interactive visual content and is in use by both the City of Pleasant Hill and the Pleasant Hill Chamber of Commerce.

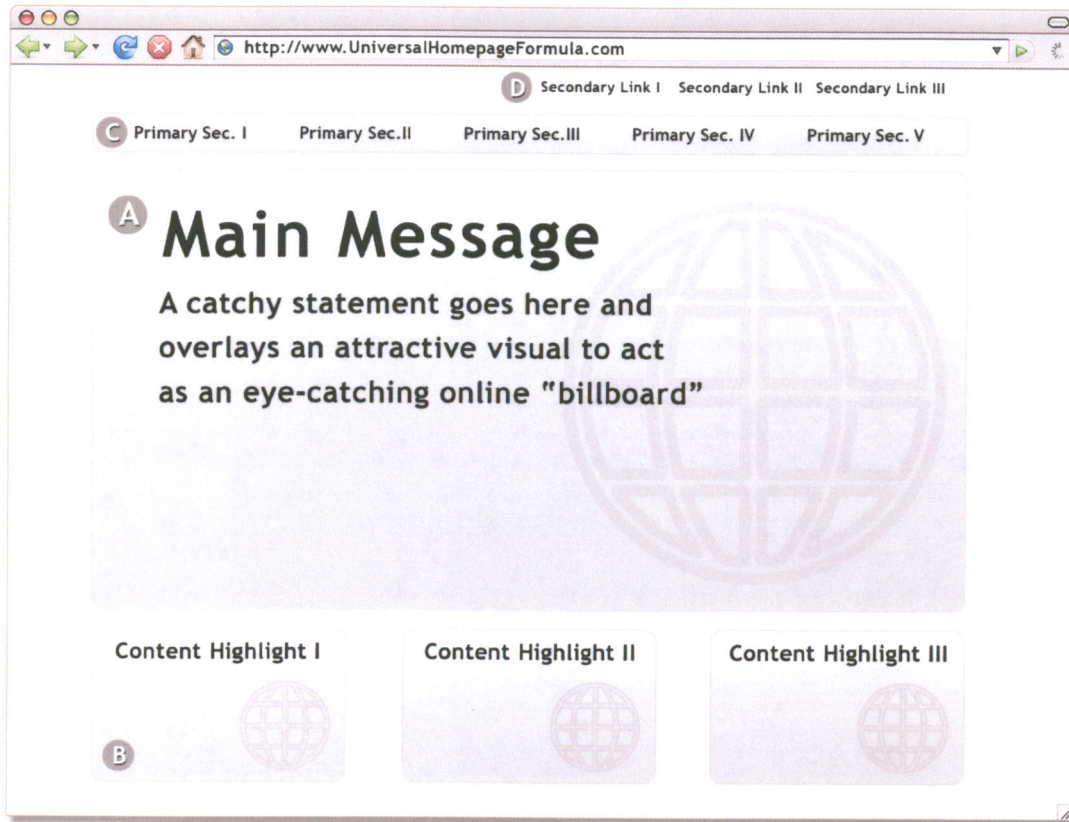
As a small business owner himself, working out of his home in Pleasant Hill, Dan is well aware of the many challenges, constraints and rewards of running a small business, especially when it comes to all things computer-related.



This Spring Dan will release his first book: *Website Marketing Essentials: Straight-Talk on Effective Design, Site Promotion, Easy E-Commerce & More for Small Business Owners*.

If you would like to be notified when it hits store shelves and receive a 20% discount, please fill-out and return the interest form on Page 8.

## The Web 2.0 Universal Homepage Formula



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Prior to the dot-com boom, the variety of site layouts and user interfaces one could encounter in an afternoon of Web surfing was mind-boggling. Every site was totally different. Navigating a site to find what you were looking for was challenging and often a waste of time. Mysterious plug-ins seemed to be required for every other website just to be annoyed by a frivolous animation, and waiting for pages to download via dial-up was excruciating.

Today, bandwidth is up along with the quality and intuitiveness of website design. Many web developers and site owners, however, still seem to stumble when it comes time to design or redesign a website. Time is often wasted starting a design completely from scratch without a model to serve as a guide. Reinventing the wheel *can* lead to a unique site, but at what cost? On the other hand, some sites are built in just a few hours using rigid, ready-made templates that allow a person with no HTML experience to simply enter in text, upload a few images and *voilà*, a website is born for a few hundred bucks and a low, monthly fee. The

best approach, and one that is more cost effective in the long run, lies in between these extremes.

The concept of benchmarking is defined by *Wikipedia* as a process of analyzing best practices, usually within one's own business sector. Benchmarking is quite prevalent within the automobile industry, for example, and has resulted in dozens of features common amongst nearly all brands of cars. The manufacturers are not outright copying one another; instead they are mimicking or drawing inspiration from each other. Benchmarking web designs of attractive, high-budget sites is a perfect strategy for building a small business website for owners with modest online marketing resources.

Analyses of the homepages of the more effective and attractive sites online yields valuable insight into the universal characteristics that make these sites' designs successful. These sites have converged on a design scheme that we will refer to as the Web 2.0 Universal Homepage Formula (WUHF). Years of benchmarking by designers looking to improve graphic user interfaces in the face of limited screen real estate (without scrolling), and the limited attention span of users with itchy mouse-clicking fingers, has produced a unified homepage look.

The formula is illustrated above and discussed below.

Sites employing WUHF have a dominant visual area (A) that acts like a billboard next to a highway seeking to grab a user's attention and hook them into exploring the homepage and hopefully the rest of the website. Spending a significant portion of the website development budget on this part of the homepage, on a professional photographer or illustrator, is definitely wise. There's only one chance to make a good first impression, even in Cyberspace.

The next part of the formula is the Content Highlight button (B). Three to six of these buttons serve to focus the user's attention on key features of the website. They combine text and often a small image atop a background graphic to visually promote the item. One of the buttons ideally acts in the "call to action" role and may have include animation (e.g., images fading in and out) or scrolling text of some sort. For example, a retail store's website may have a "Shop Our Online Store" button and non-profit agencies a "Make a Donation Now" button.

The content highlight buttons are most often found below the billboard, but can also overlay a portion of the billboard, or sit off to the side. Sites with a significant amount of content can accommodate more than a handful of buttons by varying their size and other visual characteristics. Most small business websites, however, will benefit by sticking to a "less is more" approach.



Navigation is separated into two distinct areas (C and D). The Primary Navigation Area (C) is typically horizontal above the billboard (A) and has four to six sections. Each section may simply be a link, or if the amount of content on the site merits it, a drop-down list of links to content within that section. The Secondary Navigation Area (D) is where the links to standard pages common to most websites are placed. These may include links to the homepage, contact page, and site map as well as a search feature. Since these items are so common and less important than, for example, a link to an online store or reservation form, separating them from the primary navigation helps promote the primary sections. Crowding all these links into the primary navigation area (C) makes it harder for users to key in on the important sections.

Having fewer primary sections in general is wise for small business websites. Given the small amount of content on some sites there is a temptation to put links to all the pages right on the homepage. This sets a precedent for new pages added to the site to also have their links included on the homepage, which then quickly becomes cluttered and likely reduces the site's effectiveness as a sales tool. Here again, WUHF dictates that less is more.

WUHF is more of a layout guide than a content guide for small business owners. Most small business websites do not have sufficient plain text content on the homepage. Small businesses that are not spending thousands of dollars on other forms of advertising (TV, radio, print ads) need to have content on the homepage. It is acceptable if this content is "below the fold" requiring users to scroll down the page to see it. This content is for search engine robots to pick-up and use to index the site and display in the search results and hopefully lead new customers to the website.

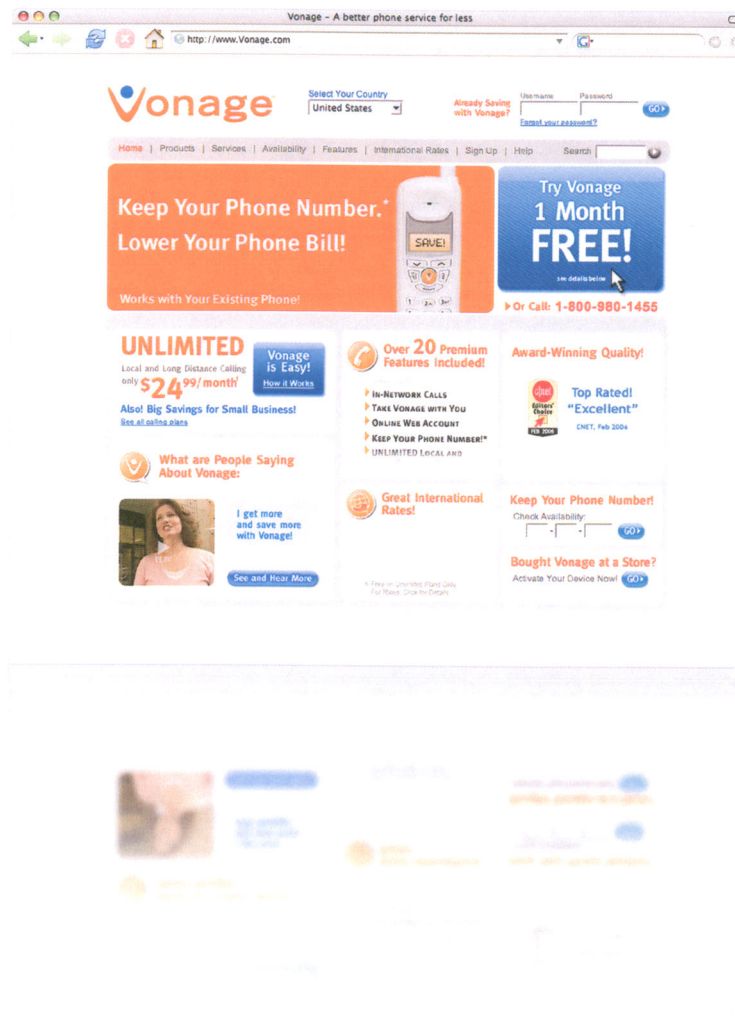
*\*The discussion above is an excerpt from Dan Stone's forthcoming book*  
**Website Marketing Essentials: Straight-Talk on Effective Design, Site Promotion, Easy E-Commerce & More for Small Business Owners.**

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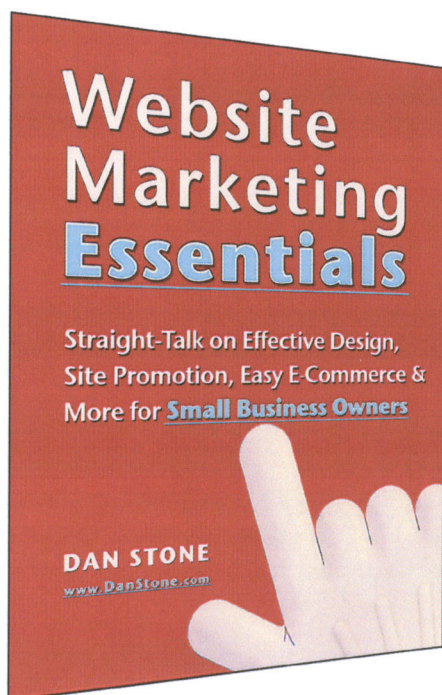
### **PDA Benefits for the Small Business Owner**

*Example: Yahoo! Go (<http://go.connect.yahoo.com/go>)*



## Voice Over Internet Protocol (VoIP) Telephone Service

Example: Vonage (<http://www.Vonage.com>)



## Coming Soon!

A concise, *Cliff Notes*® style guide covering the essentials of marketing a small business on the Web.

Perfect for business owners looking to do more with their websites and make more money from them.

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